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ABSTRACT

One method for assessing teacher performance is the teacher portfolio. This is a collection of work produced by a teacher to highlight and demonstrate his or her knowledge and skills in teaching. A portfolio also provides a means for reflection and an opportunity to critique one's own work and evaluate one's own effectiveness as a teacher. Rather than being a folder laden with teaching artifacts and evaluations, a teacher portfolio should be a document created by a teacher that indicates the teacher's duties, expertise, and growth in teaching. Each assertion in the portfolio is documented in an appendix or a reference to outside material. Portfolios are used as a means of authentic assessment in evaluating the teacher for licensure or employment decisions, and they are also a way to provide feedback to teachers so that they can improve their teaching. Portfolios that are used to make personnel decisions come under a higher level of scrutiny than if the purpose is professional growth alone. Making the portfolio evaluation as objective as possible requires careful planning. Steps for implementing a portfolio program are outlined. Four sources are listed as recommended reading. (Contains 1 figure.) (SLD)

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

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Teacher Portfolio Assessment

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If you are a teacher, are you a good teacher? Would you like to be a better teacher? If you are an administrator, are the teachers for whom you are responsible doing a good job? Assessing the productivity, efficiency and effectiveness of teachers is a formidable task. While the National Teacher's Exam may provide a minimum criterion for the certification of teachers, it is not meant to be used as a measure of teacher effectiveness. One method for assessing teacher performance is the teacher portfolio.

What Is a Teacher Portfolio?

A teacher portfolio is a collection of work produced by a teacher. Just as an artist uses a portfolio of collected works to illustrate his or her talents, a teacher portfolio is designed to demonstrate the teacher's talents. Thus, teacher portfolios are constructed by teachers to highlight and demonstrate their knowledge and skills in teaching. A portfolio also provides a means for reflection; it offers the opportunity for critiquing one's work and evaluating the effectiveness of lessons or interpersonal interactions with students or peers.

What is actually included or related in a teacher portfolio depends on how the portfolio will be used. A portfolio may include some or all of the following:

- Teacher background.
- Class description: time, grade and content.
- Written examinations: National Teacher's Exam, State licensure tests.
- A personal statement of teaching philosophy and goals.
- Documentation of effort to improve one's teaching: seminars, programs, etc.
- Implemented lesson plans, handouts and notes.
- Graded student work such as tests, quizzes and class projects.
- Video/audio tape of classroom lessons.
- Colleague observation records.
- Written reflections on teaching.
- Photographs of bulletin boards, chalkboards or projects.

A common misconception is that a teacher portfolio is a folder laden with teaching artifacts and evaluations. Ideally, a teacher portfolio is a document created by the teacher that reveals, relates and describes the teacher's duties, expertise and growth in teaching. Each assertion in the portfolio is then documented in an appendix or a reference to outside material, such as videotapes or lengthy interviews. The size of a portfolio varies, but it is typically two to ten pages, plus appendices.

How Is a Teacher Portfolio Used?

A teacher portfolio is an education tool, which is primarily used in two ways. First, portfolios are used as a means of authentic assessment in evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher for licensure and/or employment decisions. Second, teacher portfolios are used to provide feedback to teachers so that they may improve their teaching and level of professionalism.

As a form of authentic assessment, teacher portfolios may play a major role in the overall evaluation of a teacher. Numerous universities, such as the University of Colorado at Boulder, Marquette University and Murray State University, now use portfolios to make personnel decisions. Many other States and institutions use teacher portfolios to augment more traditional assessment measures, such as standardized tests and observation checklists.

However, the use of teacher portfolios for high-stakes decisions, such as certification and advancement, is not universally endorsed. The reasons for caution often cited include the subjectivity involved in evaluating portfolios, the variability in content and construction of portfolios, and the lack of consensus in what a teacher should know and be able to do.

The majority of the programs that use teacher portfolios are preservice teacher education programs. These programs use portfolios to increase reflection and provide an ongoing record of a teacher's growth. The portfolio provides a vehicle for assessing the relationship between teacher choices or actions and their outcomes. In addition, teachers are encouraged to share their portfolios, during construction, with both beginning and experienced teachers. This continuous dialogue is designed to provide a rich context in which to experience the multifaceted nature of teaching.

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How Is a Teacher Portfolio Evaluated?

Portfolios that are used to make personnel decisions tend to come under a higher level of scrutiny than if the intended use is professional growth. This scrutiny is due to the importance of the consequences involved in using portfolios for personnel decisions, and has resulted in several concerns. Most often cited areas of concern are the flexibility and subjectivity of the portfolio.

The construction of a portfolio is such that each portfolio is unique and tailored to the individual. As a tool for professional development, this is a positive feature; as a tool for arriving at personnel decisions, where comparability between teachers (often from different subject areas) is desired, the lack of standardization is a problem.

The lack of, or need for, standardization can be rectified by requiring certain items in the portfolio of a teacher seeking a position or to advance. Other items may be included at the teacher's discretion. Mandated items typically include:

- Statement of teaching responsibilities.
- Statement of teaching philosophies and methodologies.
- Description of efforts to improve one's teaching.
- Representative course syllabi.
- Summary of institutional instructor evaluations by students.

The second concern of portfolio assessment, the subjectivity in the evaluation of the portfolio, is somewhat problematic. Teacher evaluation, in any form, is subjective. The question then becomes how to make the evaluation of portfolios as reliable and valid as possible, given their subjective nature.

Often, the solution is to use a Likert-type evaluation form, of predetermined qualities, based on the mandated items.

Figure 1. Sample Questions for Likert Evaluation

____ Are teaching materials relevant?

```
I----------I----------I----------I----------I
1          2          3          4          5
```

____ Does the teacher return student materials, such as tests and assignments , promptly?

```
I----------I----------I----------I----------I
1          2          3          4          5
```

____ Is the teacher actively engaged in improving his/her teaching skills?

```
I----------I----------I----------I----------I
1          2          3          4          5
```

Questions are then grouped into categories, such as Instructional Design, Course Management and Content Expertise, and weighted. Ratings may then be combined to generate categorical and/or overall ratings.

Steps for Implementing a Portfolio Program

Start slowly. Instituting portfolio assessment, either for advancement or growth, takes time. Allow one to two years for development, implementation and regulation of a portfolio program.

Gain acceptance. It is extremely important that both administrators and teachers accept the use of portfolios. If administrators do not relate the importance and usefulness of portfolios to their teachers, the project will fail. Likewise, if teachers do not value the portfolio approach, then they will not put forth the effort needed to ensure success.

Instill ownership. Teachers must be involved, from the beginning, in developing the portfolio program. They must feel ownership over the program's direction and use.

Communicate implementation. The teachers need to know, explicitly, how the portfolios will be used. If they will be used for advancement, then the expected structure and intended scoring methods need to be explained in detail.

Use models. Models of portfolios used by other institutions are readily available (see Seldin and Associates, 1993). These models may easily be adapted and provide examples for teachers developing their portfolio.

Be selective. Portfolios should not contain everything a teacher does. A portfolio contains carefully selected items that reflect and substantiate a teacher's expertise and achievements.

Be realistic. Portfolios are only one form of authentic assessment. As such, they should be used as a part of the assessment process, in conjunction with other measures.

Recommended Reading

Robinson, J. (1993). *Faculty orientations toward teaching and the use of teaching portfolios for evaluating and improving university-level instruction*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. .

Seldin, P., and Associates (1993). *Successful use of teaching portfolios*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company.

Vavrus, L.G., and Collins, A. (1991). "Portfolio documentation and assessment center exercises: A marriage made for teacher assessment." *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 3(2), 12-29.

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